



Inuit



Inuit family wearing winter clothing.

For more than 4,000 years the Inuit, meaning 'human beings' or 'real men' in one of the two Eskimo languages, have inhabited the Canadian Arctic, one of the harshest environments in the world. Not only did the Inuit adapt successfully to life in the north, but they also developed complex social, economic and religious traditions based on the few natural resources available and the seasonal demands of their environment. The Inuit Hall focuses on the traditional life of the Copper Eskimo, one of nine Inuit cultural groups. In highlighting aspects of Copper Eskimo culture, the hall examines such themes as cultural adaptation and survival in relation to the environment and also to the impact of non-native culture on the Inuit.

The Copper Eskimo, so called by white explorers because of their extensive use of local copper deposits, inhabited Victoria Island and the Coronation Gulf region of the central Canadian Arctic for over 800 years. The National Museum of Man owes much of its large collection of early artifacts, photographs and information on these people to the late Diamond Jenness. As an anthropologist with the Geological Survey of Canada (from which evolved the National Museums of Canada), Jenness lived and worked with the Copper Eskimo from 1914 to 1916.

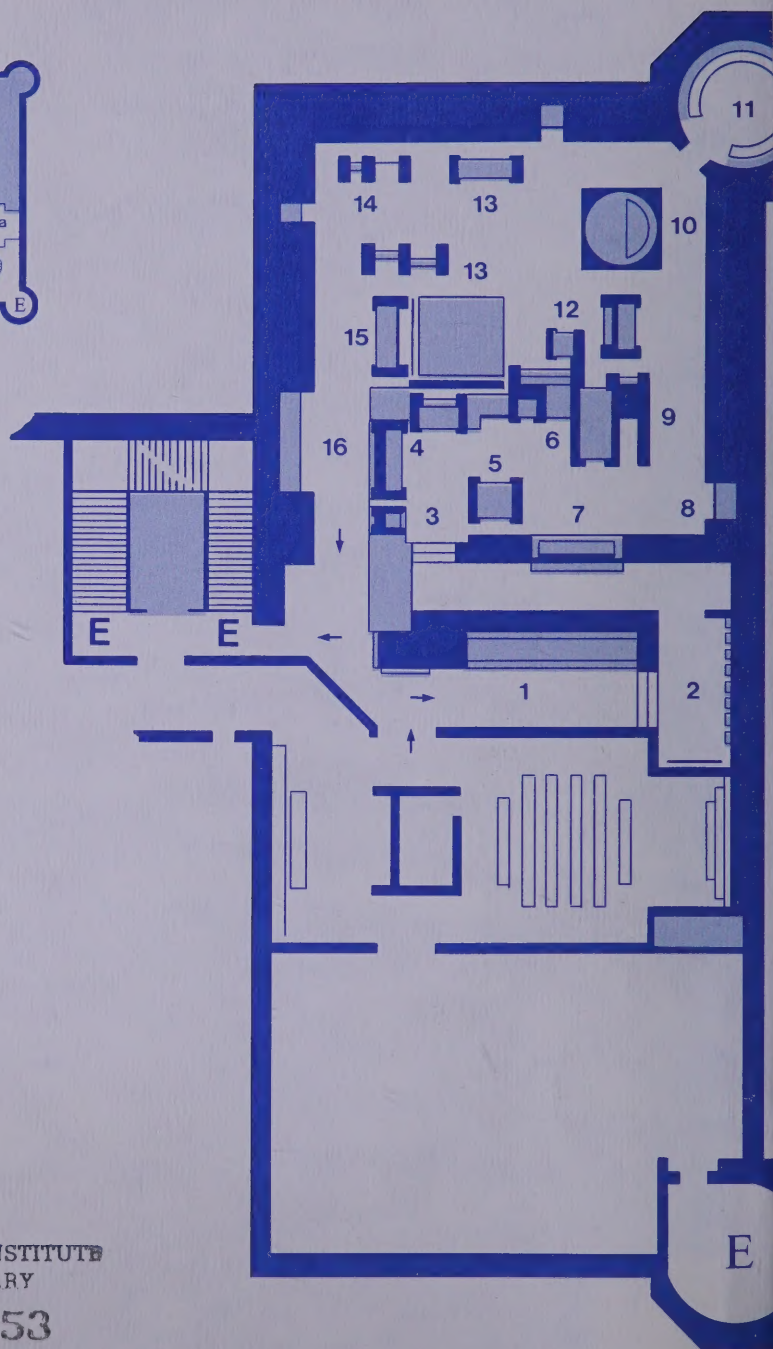
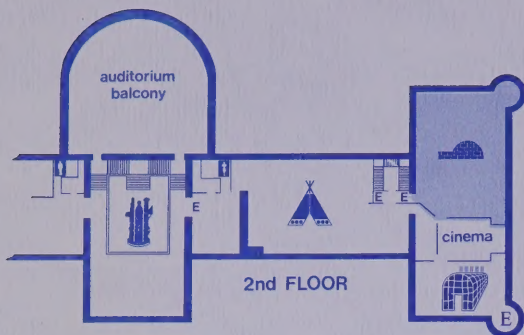
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11. SOUND DOME. In the corner of the hall an igloo-sized dome encloses a seating area where visitors can listen to recordings of Inuit music ranging from a 1913 Copper Eskimo drum dance song to modern arctic rock bands.

12. WINTER VILLAGE. Behind the snow house is a model diorama of a winter sealing village with ten snow houses, sleds and other equipment stored for the night. Each family had its own *iglu*, sometimes connected to a neighbour's by a tunnel. There is also a large central dance house built by joining the front portions of several houses together. Here people gathered to sing, dance, play games, tell stories and communicate with the many spirits that controlled the weather and animals.

13. BREATHING HOLE SEALING.

Unlike many arctic animals that migrate south during the winter, the small ringed seal lives under the ice maintaining several open breathing holes beneath the snow. Using his dog to sniff out a hole, the hunter then sets up his seal indicator stick, his fur foot

pad and his harpoon and waits for the seal to come up into the hole to breathe. A quick thrust and the seal is caught on the toggled point of the harpoon enabling the hunter to pull the seal out of the hole. A case on the wall opposite the hunter contains examples of equipment developed by the Inuit for breathing hole sealing.



14. SOCIAL LIFE. Photographs and text are used to describe the social organization of the Copper Eskimo. The family formed the basic social unit with twenty or more families making up a winter village. This community or band was established on the basis of kinship, hunting partnership or intermarriage and had no leader or formal political organization. Any problems which arose between band members were dealt with by the community as a whole.

15. EUROPEAN CONTACT. The impact of non-native culture on the Copper Eskimo began violently. The first European to see the Copper Eskimo was Samuel Hearne whose Indian companions massacred a band of Eskimos on the Coppermine River in 1771. Subsequent white-Inuit



contact in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries did little to alter the traditional Eskimo way of life. However, after 1905, the Copper Eskimo became involved in trading fox furs for rifles and other European goods with traders from Alaska and from the Mackenzie River District. Guns, Christianity and a written language are among the products of this exchange on display.

- 6. MAKING CLOTHING.** Inuit women prepared and sewed skins using a curved knife called an *ulu*, copper needles, sinew thread and bone thimbles such as those in the display case. Since it was believed that sewing skins on the sea ice angered the Sea Goddess, who sent the Copper Eskimo the

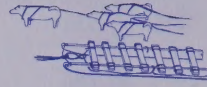


animals they hunted, all the family's winter clothes had to be made before leaving the coast for their winter camp. Approximately seven caribou hides were required to make the double-layered garments worn by both men and women. On the inner suit the fur was worn next to the skin while the outer suit had the fur outside. Mannikins illustrate typical winter outfits for men, women and children. Infants were carried in their mothers' hoods until they were able to walk and wear a proper suit of clothes.

7. FISHING. During the summer, fish was the mainstay of Copper Eskimo life. Examples of some of the equipment used are displayed opposite the clothing case. In early summer, arctic char and lake trout were caught with a hook and line through holes cut in thick lake ice, or speared in shallow water. In late summer when the arctic char began their migration from the sea, the Copper Eskimo gathered at a number of traditional fishing places. Hunters built stone dams called weirs across shallow streams to trap the fish so they could wade out with their three-pronged fish spears or leisters and catch fish to store for later use.

8. WHALEBONE SCULPTURE. Next to the fishing implements is an enormous modern sculpture of whalebone featuring three bears and other figures by Laimekee Kakee, a contemporary Inuit artist. More examples of Inuit arts and crafts are found at the end of the hall.

- 9. WINTER LIFE — SLEDS CACHES.** By December, the Copper Eskimo family had their clothing made, their supply of dried fish and caribou prepared and were ready to collect any winter equipment they had cached the previous summer and move out onto the sea ice. Approximately



one hundred people travelled together in a band to set up the first of several winter villages.

Men and dogs pulled the family's sled loaded with all their belongings over the frozen ground and rough ice. Models of many different types of sleds used across the Arctic are shown along with a large sled mounted on the wall. A mounted specimen of a sled dog sits opposite the sled. There is also a selection of photographs illustrating how food and equipment were cached until needed. This was a convenient way for a nomadic people to store material not immediately required and which they could not carry through the season.

- 10. SNOW HOUSE.** Making use of one resource which they had in abundance, the Copper Eskimo made snug winter houses out of blocks of snow. A model *iglu*, two thirds the size of an actual snow house, demonstrates the interior arrangement of sleeping, cooking and living areas. Furs cover the



raised sleeping platform at the back which is also the *iglu*'s main seating area. To one side is a soapstone lamp which provides heat and light from a burning wick of dried moss soaked in seal oil. Above the lamp hangs a soapstone cooking pot and a drying rack for mittens and boots.

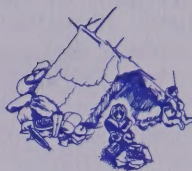


1. **INUIT PREHISTORY.** Thousands of years before the Europeans arrived, the precursors of the Inuit people began their migrations from the area around the Bering Sea eastward across the Arctic and into Greenland. Selected artifacts highlight the main periods of Inuit prehistory. The earliest, pre-

Dorset people lived four to three thousand years ago and made small flint-bladed tools. Their descendants, the Dorset people, occupied most of the Canadian Arctic from 1000 B.C. to A.D. 1000. Last came the Thule culture which spread across the Arctic from Alaska with a rich economy based on whale hunting. From these last arrivals evolved the modern Inuit. Beginning in the eighteenth century with the first European contact, the historic period of Copper Eskimo history is represented by metal artifacts. These items illustrate the impact of European materials and designs on traditional Inuit technology.

2. **ENVIRONMENT.** A large map of the Canadian Arctic and photographs of the land and animals depict the environment, resources and population distribution of the nine main cultural groups of Canada's Inuit and illustrate how the land and the climate influenced how and where people lived.

3. **SUMMER LIFE.** With the coming of spring, the Copper Eskimo prepared to exchange their snow-house villages on the sea ice for small summer campsites inland on the tundra. Caching their winter clothing and equipment on the coast, families began moving inland. The skin-covered kayak displayed on the wall at the hall entrance was used during the open water season for transportation and hunting caribou. Particularly well adapted to arctic conditions, the kayak took different forms across the North but all types employed the same frame construction.



4. **SUMMER CAMP.** Travelling in family groups or small parties related by kinship, partnership or friendship, the Copper Eskimo spent the summer wandering over the tundra, moving camp every few days to hunt, fish or trade with neighbouring people. A model of a summer campsite depicts a

number of cooking, tool making and butchering activities which required household articles made from the limited natural resources available. Typical artifacts of stone, bone and wood are displayed in a case next to the model.



5. **CARIBOU HUNTING.** The autumn caribou hunt was an important seasonal activity for the Copper Eskimo, supplying meat as well as skins for clothing, and antler, sinew and bone for tools and weapons. A single hunter armed with a spear or bow and arrow had to stalk the caribou at

close range since these and most other hunting equipment shown in the case were only effective over short distances. However, when several families worked together, caribou could be herded into a lake, for example, where hunters would wait to spear them from kayaks. A model next to the stairs illustrates another type of cooperative hunting, the caribou ambush. Lines of stone 'men' called *inuksuit* were built to guide the caribou toward three or four concealed hunters. Women and children stood between the *inuksuit* shouting and waving sticks to frighten the animals into the trap.



16. THE INUIT TODAY. Modernization and industrialization of the Inuit have virtually eliminated their traditional nomadic lifestyle as depicted in the hall. The Hudson's Bay Company store and government-built housing have replaced seasonal hunting patterns and snow houses. Social

and economic problems of twentieth century life cast a shadow over contemporary Inuit society. However, the North has undergone a revival of interest in traditional culture and technology in the last few decades indicated by the variety of arts and crafts displayed in the hall. But the Inuit are also looking into the future as their political action groups promote such concerns as land claims, health care, education and environmental protection. A large soapstone sculpture by Pierre Karlik of Rankin Inlet concludes the hall. Entitled 'Inuit Ublumi' or Eskimos Today, it represents the many facets of modern Inuit life caught between the traditional lifestyles of the past and the whiteman's world of the present. Over the centuries, the people of the North have been able to adapt and survive in an often hostile environment. The lessons they have learned still apply today. In the words of one of their own artists:

"The Eskimos today — Are searching for ways to be happy and contented;"

What will be the future of the Inuit?

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